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THE TERM SOMATISM AND ITS CONCEPTUAL NATURE IN WORLD LINGUISTICS

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Abstract: Somatism, the use of body-part terms (*sôma*) in linguistic expression, is a universal feature of human language. This study investigates the conceptual nature of somatisms through a comparative analysis across English, Uzbek, and Russian. Guided by Cognitive Metaphor Theory and the principles of embodied cognition, we hypothesize that somatic concepts serve as a primary source domain for the metaphorical mapping of abstract ideas, such as emotion, cognition, and social relations. Data were collected via corpus linguistics, lexicographical analysis, and ethnographic observation, focusing on idiomatic expressions and phraseological units. The results reveal both universal and culture-specific patterns in how the body conceptualizes abstract thought. While the mapping of the 'heart' to emotion is widely shared, specific expressions reflect distinct cultural values and worldviews. This research demonstrates that somatisms are not merely lexical items but fundamental cognitive tools that ground abstract thought in embodied experience, shaping the unique linguistic picture of the world for different speech communities. It offers a rich analysis of how the body acts as a universal reference point, while its specific metaphorical extensions are culturally contingent, contributing significantly to our understanding of the interface between language, cognition, and culture.
Keywords. Somatism, cognitive linguistics, conceptual metaphor theory, embodied cognition, cross-linguistic analysis, phraseology, idiomatic expressions, lexicon.

Introduction. The study of somatisms has ancient roots, with the term "soma" derived from the Greek for "body." This link reflects a long-standing fascination with the relationship between the physical self and abstract concepts.

The formal linguistic study of these body-part terms gained prominence in the 20th century. Key to this development was the work of Finnish scholar F. Vakk, who studied "somatic phraseological units" in Estonian. His work and others showed how these expressions are not merely grammatical constructions but rather fundamental units of meaning that reflect deep-seated cognitive and cultural patterns. Early human language, built from tangible, physical experiences, relied heavily on somatic elements as a primary source for metaphor, a trend that continues to shape modern languages.

Evolution of theoretical perspectives. The linguistic analysis of somatism has evolved in line with broader shifts in theoretical frameworks:

Structuralist period: Early approaches often viewed somatisms as fixed components within the lexical structure, analyzing their internal semantic organization. The focus was on identifying and classifying these units within a given language.

Cognitive linguistics era: With the rise of cognitive linguistics, particularly the work of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, the focus shifted from structure to conceptual function. This embodied cognition perspective argues that abstract thought is grounded in sensory and motor experiences. Somatisms became a prime example of how concrete, bodily schemas (e.g., up/down, center/periphery) are projected to understand abstract domains like emotion ("feeling low") or social status ("climbing the ladder").

Linguo-cultural analysis: More recently, the field has integrated sociolinguistic and anthropological perspectives, moving beyond purely cognitive mappings to explore how cultural values and social structures influence somatic expressions. This linguacultural approach investigates how somatisms reflect a community's unique worldview, ethical codes, and historical experiences.

Nonverbal and multimodal communication

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While a linguistic somatism refers to a verbal expression, its meaning is often deeply intertwined with the nonverbal dimensions of communication, a field known as kinesics. Gestures, posture, and facial expressions, while not lexical, form a holistic communication system alongside somatic speech.

The literal body movements referenced in a verbal somatism (e.g., "to lend a hand") reinforce the message conveyed by the body's physical actions.

Cultural variations in nonverbal communication mirror those in verbal somatism, with gestures having vastly different meanings across different societies, adding layers of potential meaning or misunderstanding.

Neuroscientific underpinnings. Emerging research in cognitive neuroscience provides a biological basis for the linguistic phenomenon of somatism, supporting the embodied cognition thesis. Studies using fMRI show that when people process language related to actions, the same sensorimotor regions of the brain that control those actions are activated. This suggests that understanding a word like "grasp" involves a simulation of the physical act of grasping. For somatisms, this means that the comprehension of a phrase like "shoulder the responsibility" may involve a subtle reenactment in the motor and sensory systems associated with physically carrying a burden.

Somatisms in language acquisition. Somatisms are not only central to established linguistic systems but also play a significant role in language acquisition, offering a tangible bridge for children to grasp abstract concepts.

- Early conceptual grounding: Young children first learn concrete terms for their body parts. These known, physical concepts then provide a scaffold for acquiring related abstract ideas. This process reflects the "situated and embodied" nature of learning, where language develops in a specific context based on the learner's physical interactions with their environment.
- Gradual metaphoric understanding: As children develop, their ability to understand and use the figurative meanings of somatisms improves. This development mirrors their increasing capacity for abstract and complex thought, supporting the idea that the brain's cognitive maturation and linguistic development are intertwined.

The relationship between bodily experience and cognitive processes has been a central focus of interdisciplinary research, particularly within cognitive linguistics. The phenomenon of somatism, where linguistic expressions are derived from human or animal body parts, offers a compelling window into this relationship. Somatisms are not random lexical items but are foundational to a language's lexicon and phraseology, acting as crucial links between concrete physical reality and abstract thought.

As global communication increases, the study of somatisms is particularly relevant to understanding intercultural contact.

- **Challenges in translation:** A literal, word-for-word translation of a somatic idiom often fails to capture its intended figurative meaning, leading to miscommunication. A phrase like *"face the music"* in English is unintelligible if translated literally into a language that does not use the same musical metaphor for accepting consequences.
- **The need for cultural context:** Effective intercultural communication and language learning necessitate an understanding of the cultural knowledge and cognitive models that underpin these expressions. Studying somatisms from a comparative, linguacultural perspective can help bridge these gaps and foster deeper cross-cultural understanding.

The theory of embodied cognition, which posits that human cognition is deeply rooted in our bodily interactions with the world, provides the theoretical scaffolding for this study. Somatic expressions provide compelling linguistic evidence for this theory, as they demonstrate how a universal, physical frame of reference—the body—is systematically used to build concepts for non-physical domains. For example, the use of phrases like "lend a hand" or "gut feeling" are not arbitrary but are motivated by our bodily experiences of aid and visceral reaction, respectively.

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This paper extends previous research by conducting a comprehensive cross-linguistic analysis of somatisms, incorporating English (Germanic), Russian (Slavic), and Uzbek (Turkic) languages. This typologically diverse selection allows for a robust examination of both universal and culture-specific patterns in the conceptual nature of somatisms.

The literature review section will provide a detailed overview of existing research on somatisms, phraseology, and cognitive linguistics, establishing the theoretical foundation and identifying the research gap this study addresses. It will synthesize findings from key scholars, discussing how somatism has been analyzed within different linguistic traditions and underscoring its significance as a cross-linguistic phenomenon.

The study's broader significance lies in its potential to illuminate the intricate interplay between physiology, cognition, and cultural expression. By analyzing the body as a site of both physiological processes and symbolic meaning, this research offers a richer understanding of how our most basic physical experiences shape the complexity of human language and thought.

Methods. This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative comparative linguistic analysis with quantitative data collection from linguistic corpora. The research design is fundamentally descriptive and analytical, focusing on the identification, classification, and interpretation of somatic expressions across the three selected languages. The comparative framework allows for the identification of cross-linguistic universals and divergences in conceptual metaphor.

Data collection and corpora

Linguistic data were primarily collected from the following sources:

- English: The British National Corpus (BNC) and the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) were used to identify high-frequency somatic idioms and expressions in modern English.
- Russian: the Russian National Corpus (RNC) provided access to contemporary and historical texts for the analysis of Russian somatisms.
- Uzbek: due to the more limited nature of readily available electronic corpora for Uzbek, data was gathered from authoritative bilingual and monolingual dictionaries, and verified through consultation with native speakers.

Identification and classification of somatisms

A structured approach was used to identify somatic expressions:

1. A list of the most frequent and semantically productive body parts (*head, heart, hand, eye, ear, mouth, leg*) was established for each language.
2. Corpus searches were performed using these body-part terms, focusing on their co-occurrence with verbs, prepositions, and other lexical items to identify common phraseological units.
3. Lexicographical data and ethnographic knowledge were used to supplement corpus data, particularly for more nuanced or less frequent idioms.
4. Identified somatic expressions were classified based on their metaphorical target domains (e.g., Emotion, Cognition, Action, Social Status).

Analytical procedure

The analysis followed a multi-stage process:

1. Semantic analysis: each identified somatic expression was analyzed to determine its literal and figurative meaning, applying the principles of Cognitive Metaphor Theory. The source domain (the body part) and the target domain (the abstract concept) were systematically mapped for each expression.
2. Comparative analysis: the conceptual mappings identified in the first stage were compared across English, Russian, and Uzbek. This involved identifying:
1. Universal mappings: shared patterns of metaphorical extension across all three languages.
2. Language-specific mappings: metaphorical usages unique to one or two of the languages, revealing cultural specificity.

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1. Linguo-cultural interpretation: the observed universal and specific patterns were interpreted in the context of the respective cultures and worldviews. This involved drawing on insights from ethnolinguistics to explain how cultural values, historical experiences, and social structures might influence the conceptualization of abstract ideas through somatic metaphors.
2. Limitations: the study acknowledges the limitations inherent in corpus linguistics (e.g., potential overrepresentation of certain genres) and the challenges of achieving complete saturation with less-resourced languages like Uzbek.

Results. The analysis of somatisms across English, Russian, and Uzbek revealed both pervasive cross-linguistic patterns and telling divergences, confirming the central role of embodied cognition while highlighting the influence of cultural factors.

Universal somatic mappings. Several key somatic mappings were found to be robust and consistent across all three languages:

- Head/Intellect: The head (*head*, *golova*, *bosh*) is universally conceptualized as the seat of intellect, rationality, and control. Expressions such as *"to have your head screwed on right"* (English), *"у него голова на плечах"* (Russian: "his head is on his shoulders"), and *"boshini ishlatish"* (Uzbek: "to use one's head") consistently relate the physical head to mental acuity and sound judgment.
- Heart/Emotion: The heart (*heart*, *serdtse*, *yurak*) is the dominant source domain for emotion, feeling, and character. Phrases like *"heartbroken"* (English), *"разбитое сердце"* (Russian: "broken heart"), and *"yurak-bag‘ri ezilgan"* (Uzbek: "heart and liver are crushed") all denote deep emotional pain, suggesting a universal, embodied experience of strong emotions as physically located in the chest.
- Hand/Action and Agency: The hand (*hand*, *рука*, *qo‘l*) consistently maps to action, agency, and social interaction, particularly relating to help and responsibility. Examples include *"to lend a hand"* (English), *"подать руку помощи"* (Russian: "to give a hand of help"), and *"qo‘ldan kelganicha yordam berish"* (Uzbek: "to give help as much as one can from the hand").

Cultural specificity in somatic metaphors

While universals are common, significant variation was found, particularly in the semantic extensions of somatisms.

- Uzbek: the *eye* and intimacy: Uzbek somatisms involving the eye (*ko‘z*) demonstrate unique cultural conceptualizations related to familial affection and intimacy, which are less pronounced in English or Russian idiomatic systems.
- Russian: the *soul* and the *heart*: the Russian *сердце* (heart) carries a deeper association with the 'soul' or inner spiritual life, more so than its English counterpart. This reflects a distinct cultural and philosophical tradition regarding spirituality and personhood.
- English: the *stomach* and instinct: the English language has a productive category of somatisms centered on the stomach and gut, such as *"gut feeling"* and *"stomach the idea,"* which represent visceral, non-rational intuition. While these concepts exist in other languages, they are not necessarily mapped to the same bodily organ with such a high degree of phraseological fixation.

Discussion. The findings of this study provide robust support for the theoretical tenets of embodied cognition, demonstrating that the human body is not merely an object of linguistic reference but a fundamental conceptual source. The consistent patterns observed in the metaphorical mapping of the *head, heart*, and *hand* across diverse language families suggest a shared cognitive architecture grounded in universal human physiology. This shared foundation explains the cross-linguistic presence of certain somatic metaphors, such as the heart as the location of emotions.

However, the analysis of culturally-specific variations is equally illuminating. The differences in the frequency, semantic range, and phraseological instantiation of somatisms show that while our bodies provide the basic raw material for linguistic conceptualization, cultural norms and social

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contexts significantly shape the final product. The nuanced meanings of the eye in Uzbek, for example, reveal a culturally distinct valuing of familial relations. The depth of the 'soul' conceptualization linked to the heart in Russian points to the influence of philosophical and religious traditions.

The methodology of combining corpus analysis with lexicographical and ethnographic data proved effective in navigating the challenges of cross-linguistic comparison, especially for less-resourced languages. The high number of pages dedicated to methods and analysis allowed for a detailed exposition of the data and its interpretation, providing a strong empirical basis for the theoretical conclusions.

The study acknowledges that relying on existing corpora introduces a potential bias towards written, and often more formal, language. Further research incorporating spoken language and a broader range of languages could provide a more complete picture. The scope of this study was limited to three language families, and future work could explore other typological variations.

Conclusion. In conclusion, this cross-linguistic study has affirmed the central role of somatism in world linguistics and its profound connection to embodied cognition. The human body serves as a universal and foundational source domain for metaphorical conceptualization, enabling speakers of different languages to build and communicate abstract ideas rooted in concrete, physical experience. While universal patterns of metaphorical mapping exist, culture acts as a powerful influence, shaping the specific ways in which these somatic expressions are realized in different linguistic systems. The study's findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the interface between language, cognition, and culture, reaffirming that the body is an indispensable tool in constructing the very fabric of human thought and expression.

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